

Jack the Ripper was Romanian and He Killed Children Who Did Not Learn - The Romanian Press and the Whitechapel Murders

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Abstract: In this paper we aim at analyzing the way in which some of the most important Romanian newspapers at the end of the 19th century brought into their readers' attention the crimes of the one known as Jack the Ripper, but also the effects upon the public in Romania from the journalistic texts in which there were reported the terrifying happenings in London. The interest of readers in everything about Jack the Ripper was huge, as evidenced by the presence of the name of the frightening killer in poems, whether humorous, political polemics, caricatures that accompanied certain articles, or texts relating to the leadership of the Romanian Academy. Jack the Ripper's crimes have come to be a source of inspiration also for the Romanian men who wanted to kill their wives.

Keywords: History of the Press; Journalism; Crime; Jack the Ripper; Whitechapel

1. A Few Explanations

In this study, we do not intend to investigate the crimes committed by Jack the Ripper, or to bring new elements regarding the identity of the one who, in the fall of 1888, held under terror the Whitechapel district, in London. Our intention is to analyze the way in which some of the most important Romanian newspapers at the end of the 19th century brought into the attention of their readers the crimes of the one known as Jack the Ripper and the effects that the journalistic texts have had, where the terrifying happenings in London were reported to the public in Romania. In our approach were used, in particular, the archives of the newspapers *Adevărul/The truth* and *Epoca/the Epoch* from the end of 1888 and the beginning of 1889. There were also quoted articles published in other publications (*Furnica/the Ant*, *Ilustrațiunea română/Romanian Illustration*, *Le Figaro*, *Lupta/The Fight*, *Realitatea ilustrată/Illustrated reality*, etc.), but also papers on serial killers and their crimes.

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2. The Crime - the Sin that Sells Newspapers

References to the types of information that the reader should find in the press are even found in the first doctoral thesis in journalism (1690). The author of this work, Tobias Peucer, makes some remarks about “selecting the right material to appear in public stories”. Peucer points out that a journalist should not include in his articles “insignificant aspects or daily activities of people, or even unfortunate events in the lives of people which happen very often in the ordinary life.” (Peucer, 2008, p. 95) The same the author also pointed out that the journalist should not include in his articles “things that damage good manners or true religion, such as obscenities, horrible crimes, swearing by people who are hardly tolerated by pious ears.” (Peucer, pp. 97-98) Tobias Peucer admits, however, that in certain situations, the journalist has to give in “somehow to the taste of time”. (Peucer, p. 98)

Speaking about the quality of the Romanian journalistic act, Octavian Goga divided the press into two categories: one for the period up to the outbreak of World War I and the other for the interwar period. The former was, in the author's opinion, superior to the second, due to the increased attention it gives to the *guidance of public opinion*. (Goga, pp. 30-31)

Crimes are among “those happenings of the day” that are known as *various facts*. (Samoilă, p. 85) In a work that appeared at the beginning of the third decade of the twentieth century, Emil Samoilă pointed out that various facts “are of direct interest only to a small number of readers.” (Samoilă, p. 85) Despite this fact, the echo produced in Romania by the crimes committed by Jack the Ripper had unimaginable dimensions until that date.

In a magazine-type publication that addresses readers of all ages, there were the following statements: For ten weeks during the autumn of 1888, London's East End was gripped by the terror of history's most notorious serial killer. Despite public outcry, the culprit was never caught, and the mystery of Jack the Ripper continues to fascinate amateur sleuths and crime enthusiasts well over a century later.” (Begg, Bennett, Jones, 2016, p. 3) “It is youths and children who are especially prone to the imitation of criminal events from books or from real life. After the murders associated with the name of Jack the Ripper several murders by young children took place throughout the country.” (Ellis, 1890, p. 177) Even in Romania there were cases of individuals who tried to kill in the style of Jack the Ripper.

3. Jack the Ripper in Romanian Newspapers

Jack the Ripper's crimes were on the pages of the Romanian newspapers, but their presence was not a special one. But the situation was different in France. In *Le Figaro*, for example, the extensive articles on Jack the Ripper (Jack l'Eventreur) and the English authorities' attempts to catch him were published. In the October 3, 1888

issue, the texts in which the Whitechapel terrible murders were scrutinized spanned several columns on the third page. In columns 1 and 2, T. Johnson wrote, *in a correspondence* from England, about Jack the Ripper's "Dear Boss", dated September 25, 1888¹. On columns 3 and 4 it was published the article "Les assassinats de Londres et l'anatomie en Angleterre/ The assassinations from London and the anatomy in England", which was signed by Dr. Janicot. In this last article, there was talk of the possibility that the Whitechapel murders might have as their starting point an American uterine collector.² On Nov. 12, "Whitechapel", a feature report, signed by T. Johnson, stretched on a column and a half (columns 5 and 6) on the second page. One of the conclusions reached by the author of the text was that after killing Mary Jane Kelly, Jack the Ripper will probably kill again³. Articles of this kind were also published in *Le Figaro* and after the aforementioned date. But we will return to what happened in the Romanian press.

At that time, the Romanian newspapers were particularly concerned about what was known as "Miulescu Business"⁴ or under "The Crime of the Soarelui Street"⁵. These were, in particular, *the terrible discoveries* "on the murder of the Sun Street, for which the unfortunate husbands Miulescu were wrongly condemned."⁶ The public's attention was also on the parliamentary elections that were held in October of that year. The somewhat low number of news related to the legendary killer's deeds could also be explained by the fact that the telegraphic transmission of the news involves a huge expense for a newspaper. The correspondent had to concentrate the information, in order to convey only what was essential. (Samoilă, p. 89)

In a news release published in *Adevărul/The Truth*, *two women were murdered* in London on the night of 19-20 September 1888. The two crimes were committed "under the same conditions as Whitechapel. The victims' intestines were taken."⁷ From the same newspaper the Romanian readers learned that in London there were public meetings in which the resignations of those who at that time were at the head of the London Police and the Ministry of the Interior⁸ were called for. From another news we find out that the London Police doubled the number of East End watches,

¹ Johnson, T. (1888). Correspondance anglaise/English correspondence. *Le Figaro*, 34e Year, 3e Série, No 277, 3 October, p. 3.

² Dr. Janicot (1888). Les assassinats de Londres et l'anatomie en Angleterre/ The assassinations of London and anatomy in England. *Le Figaro*, 34e Year, 3e Série, No 277, 3 October, p. 3.

³ Johnson, T. (1888). Whitechapel. *Le Figaro*, 34th Year, 3e Série, No 317, 12 November, p. 2.

⁴ *** (1888). Afacerea Miulescu/ Miulescu affair. *Adevărul/The Truth*, 1st year, no. 39, 2nd edition, 29 September, pp. 2-3.

⁵ *** (1888). The Crime of the Sun Street. *The Epoch*, 3rd Year, no. 852, second edition, September 28, pp. 1-2; *** (1888). Miulescu affair, year I, no. 39, 2nd edition, 29 September 1888, pp. 2-3.

⁶ *** (1888). The Crime of the Sun Street. *The Epoch*, 3rd Year, no. 852, second edition, September 28, pp. 1-2; *** (1888). Miulescu affair, year I, no. 39, 2nd edition, 29 September 1888, p. 3.

⁷ Havas, (1888). The Telegraphic Service of Adevarul/The truth. *Adevărul/ The truth*, 1st year, no. 31, 1st edition, 20 September, p. 1.

⁸ *** (1888). From Everywhere. *Adevărul/ The truth*, year I, no. 34, 2nd edition, 23 September, p. 2.

and civilian and amateur detective officers traveled the streets of Whitechapel at night. Amateur detectives also showed that instead of helping, they were more disturbing the actions of the authorities.¹ Also from *Adevărul/The Truth*, readers learned that Jack the Ripper could be a traveling killer who, before arriving in London, killed women in France.²

At the beginning of December, in the same newspaper, it appeared that police in London had arrested an individual they suspected was the author of the Whitechapel crimes.³ The identity of Jack the Ripper, which some voices said was the best example of an *alienation ruled by the mania of destruction*⁴, was, according to Romanian inter-war journalists, known to English policemen who investigated the crimes of the frightening murderer. But being an influential person, they classified the information that could have led the public to discover the identity of Jack the Ripper and thus turning him into a sort of legendary hero:

“All you have to do is mention this name [Jack the Ripper], for the women in the unfortunate class of love vendors to thrill. Although the identity of the murderer has been shrouded in mystery for the general public, it is believed that in the Scotland Yard archives there would be a complete 'dossier' indicating not only the real name of the assassin, but [and] the circumstances in which he died and the cause of its numerous crimes. It is believed to have been a known surgeon, who led a double life and ended up in a mad house.”⁵

In the interwar press it was also published information that clearly had no connection with reality:

“It was the man known as “Jack the Ripper”, whose asset is over 100 [of] crimes committed against prostitutes, all executed in the same way.

In profound fogs, Jack Ripper hired a prostitute, which he possesses in the shadow of a wall, or in a deserted courtyard. During the spasm, the killer, with a knife, breaks the prostitute's belly.

¹ *** (1888). From Everywhere. *Adevărul/ The truth*, year I, no. 45, 2nd edition, 6 October, p. 2.

² *** (1888). Montrouge and Whitechapel. *Adevărul/ The truth*, 1st year, no. 80, second edition, November 19, p. 3.

³ (1888). From Everywhere. *Adevărul/ The truth*, 1st year, no. 91, second edition, 2 December, p. 2.

⁴ *** (1938). Nebuni careucid/ Crazy people who kill. *Realitatea ilustrată/Illustrated reality*. anul XIIth Year, no. 587, 20 April, p. 28.

⁵ Raskay, L. (1936). Un lanț de crime în Soho. Ciudata insulă din inima Londrei/ A chain of murders in Soho. The strange island in the heart of London. *Realitatea ilustrată/Illustrated reality*, Xth year, no. 490, 10 June, p. 4.

After the deadly death blow, those who dealt with the strange case of this criminal maniac, believe that Jack the Ripper was, of course, a renowned surgeon of his time.”¹

Although the theories of the Romanian inter-war press are of interest, we will return to Jack the Ripper's era. The idea that the frightening killer in London is accustomed to traveling through Europe to find new victims has been taken seriously in Romania. This is supported by a story published in the spring of 1889 in the *Epoca/The epoch* newspaper:

“Yesterday, at 10 o'clock, while the girls at the Institute were on break, in the classroom, with the doors open to the road, a gentleman came in, and the girls immediately began to shout: “*Jack the Ripper*” and they've all gone shouting.

This Gentlemen, who was none other than Mr. Șaicariu, a school inspector, could hardly, after many attempts, reassure the frightened girls.”²

The fear of women in Romania being killed by Jack the Ripper was exploited by *the scums of the slums*. They sent to women threatening letters that were signed by Jack the Ripper. The journalists of *Epoca/The Epoch* were asking the authorities to take action in this regard.³

3. Jack the Ripper's Nationality

Less than two weeks after the last of five crimes attributed to Jack the Ripper, *Epoca/The Epoch* newspaper reported on a strange fact in London:

“A violent emotion enveloped Whitechapel's residents one night, through the deeds and gestures of a “I am the female ripper, Jack the Ripper”.

This individual had the dark figure and gestured like a madman. Two young men, rushing over him, immediately arrested him. Immediately, the crowd gathered began to shout “death to the ripper!” Several sticks were raised and fell on the shoulder of the individual, also hitting the two women who held it. Luckily, the police ran. A moment later, the population would cut the so-called Jack the Ripper and it would then be impossible to recognize his identity and establish whether he is innocent or guilty.”⁴

¹ R. (1936). Vampirul Londrei. Teroarea din «Soho»/Vampire of London. Terror in „Soho”. *Ilustrațiunea română/ Romanian illustration*, VIIIth year, no. 22, 27 May, p. 16.

² *** (1889). The Echoes of the Day. *Epoca/The Epoch*, IV, no. 992, 2nd edition, 10 March, p. 2.

³ *** (1889). The Incidents of the Day. *Epoca/The Epoch*, IV, no. 1001, 3rd edition, March 21, p. 2.

⁴ *** (1889). Felurimi. *Epoca?teh Epoch*, IIIrd year, no. 895, 3rd Ed., 18 November, p. 3.

From a news story published in the same newspaper, but a few months later, we find that Jack the Ripper had followers in Bucharest. Someone named Wolff tried to kill his wife, whom he had suspected for 20 years to be unfaithful. Man's attack occurred at night, while the woman was asleep.

"Last night, while the wretched woman was asleep, Wolff took a small knife, hit her in the genitals and cut her.

At the victim's screams, the neighbors ran, and finally the killer was caught. He began to shout, "I am Jack the Ripper!"

The woman, though seriously injured, is not in danger of death.

Wolff was sent to the prosecutor's office"¹

Variants of the London frightening killer were also reported in other European states.² Journalists from the *Universul literar/Literary Universe* wrote in April 1895 about how Jack the Ripper killed two women in Spain.³ In Paris, Jack the Ripper attacks unaccompanied women to trim them⁴. A few years later, Jack the Ripper killed again, first in Berlin, and then in New York.⁵ In Romania, the readers' interest in everything related to Jack the Ripper was proved by the presence of the name of the frightening killer in poems⁶, whether humorous, political journalism polemics⁷, caricatures that accompanied certain articles⁸, or texts relating to the leadership of the Romanian Academy⁹. In Iasi, the name of Jack the Ripper was used to scare "lazy and naughty children who did not listen to their parents and did not learn at school." (Suțu, 1923, pp. 315-316)

¹ *** (1889). Latest Information. *Epoca/The Epoch*, IVth Year, no. 991, 3rd Edition, March 9, p. 3.

² (1904). Un nou Jack Spintecătorul / A New Jack Ripper. *Adevărul/The truth*, 17th year, no. 5269, 5 April, p. 3.

³ *** (1895). Jack Spintecătorul în Spania/ Jack The Ripper in Spain. *Universul literar/Literary Universe*, XIIIth year, no. 15, 10 April, p. 6.

⁴ *** (1903). Noutăți/News. *Bunul Econom/the Good Economist*, year IVth, no. 12, 29 March, p. 6.

⁵ *** (1907). Noutăți/News. *Tribuna/The tribune*, XIth year, no. 161, 20 July, p. 6.

⁶ Napadarjan, Kiriak (1914). Urmările războiului/ The consequences of the war. *Furnica/The Ant*, XIth Year, no. 14, 2 December, p. 11.

⁷ Constantin C. Bacalbașa (1894). Radicalii și Conservatorii/The radicals and conservatives. *Lupta/Th fight*, XIth year, no. 2460, 10 December, p. 1.

⁸ Arghezi, T. (1933). Punctul mort/The dead end. *Adam*, Vth Year, no. 60, 1 June, p. 3.

⁹ Tarascon (1910). Din culisele Academiei/ From the back stage of the Academy. *Furnica/The ant*, VI year, no. 40, 10 June, p. 2.

4. Conclusions

The presence of the frightening murderer on the pages of some of the most important Romanian newspapers was low. In spite of this fact, Jack the Ripper's crimes have also produced effects in Romania. The men who were dissatisfied with the family life had tried to murder their wives in the style of the famous murderer, the women were receiving threatening letters that were signed by Jack the Ripper, the teachers were confused by the students with the frightening criminals in London, and the children who did not have good school results were said to be split by Jack the Ripper. The ones shown in our study support what Pamfil Șeicaru, one of the most important Romanian journalists, said about eight decades ago about the press. In his view, the press may, when not being used with care, have a harmful effect on the citizens of a country. Thus, instead of being *a vehicle of correspondence* between people, the newspaper turns into a *dangerous printed paper*. (Teodorașcu, 2014, pp. 89-90)

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